

PUTTING LIFE IN FOCUS

Principal wins photo Contest

By ROSE DUGER
KEARNY CORRESPONDENT

Harrison High School Principal Ronald Shields doesn't consider himself a photographer.

But the Kearny resident is so inspired by the natural beauty of the Meadowlands that his admiration naturally shines through in his photos.

Shields recently received a first place award, as well as an honorable mention, in an amateur photography contest sponsored by the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission.

His photo, "Out on a Limb," placed first out of more than 100 entries in the contest and earned Shields a \$300 prize. His image captures a young night-heron surveying the Mill Creek Marsh in Secaucus from its perch on a tree branch jutting over the water.

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WINNING PHOTO by Harrison High School Principal Ronald Shields of Kearny captures a young night-heron surveying the Mill Creek Marsh in Secaucus from its perch on a tree branch.

Harrison principal wins photography prize

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Another of Shields' shots, entitled "Fly By," shows an osprey flying majestically above the Mill Creek Marsh. That image won an honorable mention in the contest.

The principal often visits Meadowlands trails and marshes in Kearny, Secaucus and Lyndhurst to relax from his hectic job as a high school principal.

He calls the Meadowlands area "a great source of inspiration and relaxation." "The things you can see there are phenomenal," Shields said. "I have yet to go there and not see something new. There are so many treasures and charms there, it's phenomenal . . . in a world that's more and more virtual, it's nice to get out and see something real."

Shields initially got into photography through his job at Harrison High School, where he regularly records students' aca-

demic and athletic achievements by shooting photos to build pride in the student body.

While the lifelong Kearny resident says he's no artist, it was inevitable that he wandered into the artistic side of photography.

His wife, Marypat, is an art teacher in Harrison, while son Colin is studying photography at the Parsons School of Design and daughter Amelia, a senior at Kearny High School, is also considering a career in art and photography.

Shields recalled growing up in Kearny at a time when the Meadowlands area was so polluted it was referred to by locals simply as "the dumps." Through the years, the area's environment has improved considerably.

Now, it's an oasis where often rare birds stop on their migratory route and other species flourish. Shields says he gives a

"big hats off" to the NJMC for its perseverance in preserving the delicate marshland and for promoting environmental programs that highlight the area and its many wonders.

He especially credits NJMC staffer James Wright, who writes a blog on the Meadowlands, for getting the word out to locals.

"It's kind of like teaching," Shields say of the Meadowlands. "Sometimes you have to look through the problems and mistakes and see the great potential that exists."

The winners' photos will be on display at the NJMC's Flyway Gallery in Lyndhurst through Jan. 3. The gallery is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

It is one of several free attractions at the Meadowlands Environment Center, which is located in DeKorte Park, a 110-acre oasis with walking trails and water views, all framed by the New York City skyline.



RONALD SHIELDS PHOTO

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